

Rosanell Eaton, Fierce Voting Rights Advocate, Dies at 97

By Robert D. McFadden

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Rosanell Eaton, a resolute African-American woman who was hailed by President Barack Obama as a beacon of civil rights for her role as a lead plaintiff in a lawsuit against a restrictive North Carolina voting law that reached the Supreme Court in 2016, died on Saturday in Louisburg, N.C. She was 97.

Ms. Eaton’s daughter, Armenta Eaton, said she died in hospice care at the home they had shared in recent years.

Caught up as a witness to history in one of the nation’s major controversies, Ms. Eaton, an obscure civil rights pioneer in her younger years, became a cause célèbre after Mr. Obama cited her courage in his response to a 2015 article in The New York Times Magazine about growing efforts to dismantle the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

“I was inspired to read about unsung American heroes like Rosanell Eaton in Jim Rutenberg’s ‘A Dream Undone: Inside the 50-year campaign to roll back the Voting Rights Act,’ ” Mr. Obama wrote in a letter to the editor. “I am where I am today only because men and women like Rosanell Eaton refused to accept anything less than a full measure of equality.”

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